

Food Bites: Georis, Miller to open Mundaka on March 27

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He's either a shrewd, innovative visionary or a madman. Perhaps both. But Gabe Georis is not short on gumption, opening a new Carmel restaurant in the middle of the most dire economic climate in our country's history.

It's called Mundaka, a Spanish-style, tapas-centric restaurant in downtown Carmel, and Georis hopes the family's restaurant magic (Casanova, La Bicyclette, Corkscrew Cafe) continues. It's easily the most anticipated restaurant opening on the Peninsula in at least four years, and that in itself gives Mundaka a fighting chance.

Georis has certainly created a buzz. He's tapped into one of the country's hottest dining trends; hired one of the area's top chefs — Brandon Miller (formerly of Stokes); created a hip decor using sustainable, recycled products; and injected life into a dated, dark space once occupied by The Gem, a longtime locals spot that had fallen out of favor.

Pushing construction crews — and Chef Miller — to the limit, Georis has raced ahead to reach his goal of a March opening. The big day is set for Friday, March 27 (get on the e-mail list at www.mundaka.com). The first two weeks will feature dinner only, with lunch service planned for April 15 (a reason to celebrate on the normally stressful tax deadline day).

Not only will the creations be authentic to Spain (Georis paid for Miller to travel through Spain

tasting everything within reach), the new 46-seat Spanish restaurant is sustainable from floor to ceiling; the entire remodel was done using reclaimed materials.

Items have been collected from houses that were to be torn down in San Francisco and from houses that burned in the Big Sur fires. There is a 4-foot-high wall around the entire front section of the restaurant made out of colorful, old, vintage doors cut and assembled like a piece of art to create a border on the wall. The doors came from old barns in the county or from torn-down Victorians in San Francisco. The bar-top is a piece of old redwood (it weighs 600 pounds) that was milled in the 1960s and left in a ranch in Big Sur. The facade of the bar is corrugated metal from the Pit Creek area in Big Sur, salvaged from a house that burned down, the burnt shades of orange and amber evidence to that.

Additional novelties include old Speakeasy lighting from a house in Pacific Heights in San Francisco; schoolhouse-style lights in the lounge from officer housing at Fort Baker in Marin; a floor made from old walnut wood scraps; and fabrics and pillows made from leftover silk from the Talbot Tie factory.

For the first few weeks, Miller will partner with guest chef and food stylist Amanda Laporte from Barcelona. The menu will feature daily selections of tapas such as patatas bravas (cold tapas and wine will be available from 3-5 p.m. each day). Miller plans main courses such as local fish and family-style steak, along with a variety of Spanish desserts. Prices will range from \$3-\$6 for tapas and \$14 for main course items. The wine list will include diverse Spanish selections, along with the best from other European regions, as well as local wines.

Mundaka is at San Carlos between Ocean and 7th and will be open daily. For more information on the grand opening, to make reservations or book a

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ACF to honor Chef Pagan

For the last 10 years Mary Pagan has trained aspiring chefs, restaurateurs and home cooks through her accredited Culinary Center of Monterey. On Sunday, the industry will honor her contributions when the American Culinary Federation, Monterey Bay Chapter names her as its 35th Chef of the Year.

"Mary has been an inspiration to all of us in the culinary world for a decade," said Paul Lee, president of ACF, Monterey Bay. "Her vision, persistence and unbounded talent regularly demonstrate to us all just how far an individual can climb with courage, determination and skill."

In addition to training and placing professional chefs, Pagan conducts classes for individuals and groups, corporate team-building programs and is involved in many civic and industry-driven events. The Culinary Center also serves lunch and hosts local events.

Tickets for the awards dinner at the Monterey Marriott are \$100. A reception with cocktails begins at 6 p.m., with dinner and awards presentation following.

For tickets or information, call 333-0475 or 624-9515.

Barrel tasting and pizza

Marilyn Remark Winery will hold a barrel tasting and pizza party from 12:30-4 p.m. on Sunday at the winery, 645 River Road.

Cost is \$20 per person, or \$12 for wine club

members and their first two guests. Chef Don Ferch, formerly executive chef at the Highlands Inn and now owner of Contemporary Catering, will prepare gourmet pizzas from a portable wood-burning pizza oven — paired with current wines and future vintages right from the barrel.

Reservations: joel@remarkwines.com.

Tidbits

Highlands Inn has extended its special "Super Abs" abalone tasting series, as part of an exclusive partnership with Monterey Abalone Company. Executive Chef Mark Ayers' appetizer series features dishes highlighting the local abalone farming company's "Super Abs" — the first red abalone grown in Monterey using a revolutionary, extremely sustainable and environmentally friendly approach. I attended a blind taste test in January and loved the more natural, deeper flavor of the new abs ... Zeph's One Stop in Salinas will pour wines from De Tierra and Paraiso tonight as part of its monthly tasting program. Corks will pop beginning at 5:30 p.m. and the cost is \$25 at the door. Zeph's is at 1366 S. Main St. 757-3947 or www.zephsonestop.com

Zeph's in-house neighbor Portobello's is the sight of a winemaker's dinner on March 21 hosted by the Rotary Club of Salinas. The dinner is part of the club's annual Valley of the World Wine and Food Festival fundraiser. The featured wine is from Hahn and the cost is \$75 per person. 775-4721 or www.wineandfoodfestival.org Tabouli at 309 Lighthouse Avenue has changed to Paprika Cafe — same owner, slightly different concept. It's now a more economical version, offering smaller plates for less money. Mediterranean food fans (especially vegetarians) should check it out. ... The C Restaurant at the Intercontinental on Cannery Row plans a five-course wine dinner paired with Estancia on Wednesday. Cost for the 6:30 p.m. event is \$95. 375-4800.

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